

**Red Rock Ranger District
January 17, 2013 Non-motorized Trails Planning Meeting
6-8PM, Hilton Hotel at the Ridge in VOC**

Next meeting will be on Thursday February 21, 2013 from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Hilton Sedona – 90 Ridge Trail Drive

For Forest Service related information on this trail planning process contact Jennifer Burns at 928-203-7529 jmburns@fs.fed.us For more information regarding the RTCA Program contact Cate Bradley at 520-791-6472 cate_bradley@nps.gov

Meeting notes and other trail planning materials will be posted to the Coconino Forest website at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/coconino/landmanagement/planning> or find meeting notes and other related documents to this planning process at www.vvcc.us scroll to the RTCA Documents link.

January 17th Participants: Jeff Bear, Spence Gustav, Steve McClain, Craig Stevens, Leslie Stevens, Doug Brown, Barbara O'Connor, Janice Starkey, Mike Haboush, C. Kommer, Darcy Hitchcock, George Witteman, Heide Heidepriem, Keith Peterson, Andy Beeler, Kathy Sevy, Janie Agyagos, Paul Sullivan, Carol Wirkus, Don Buffoni, Craig Bierly, Ralph Perry, Martin Glinisky, Angela LeFevre, Len Ostrom, Rocky Luedeker, Jim Higgs, Carol Hicks, John Chorlton, Lars Romig, Rachel Murdoch, Ed Waale, Rolf Reinfried, Rick Riedel, Carole Piszczetc, Rod Veach, Olga Ostrom, Lee luedeker, Spike Hicks, Anthony Quintile, Rama, Patrick Kell, Brian Ryess, Roger Sneed, Dave Cichon, Paul LeFevre, Juliette Colangelo, Sue Tipton, John Lacy, Gayle Higgs, Ian Wickson, Jennifer Young, Lauren Browne, Jodi Nelson, Phil Kincheloe, H. Baker, Dixon Foss, Mike Harris, Doug Copp, John Finch, Jack Drucker, Terry Drucker, Donna Tuckev, Richard Calvert, Ann Duffy, Mark Haughout, Brigit Loewenstein, Eric Mace, Mike Ward, Heather Provencio, Francisca Adrian, Kevin Lehto, Travis Bone, Jennifer Burns, Cate Bradley (apologies for misspellings)

Meeting Agenda

- Welcome / Introductions / Updates
- Presentation about the Biology on the Red Rock District
- Presentation about the Archaeology on the Red Rock District
- Presentation about the Search and Rescue activities on the Red Rock District
- What worked about this meeting and what needs to be changed for future meetings?

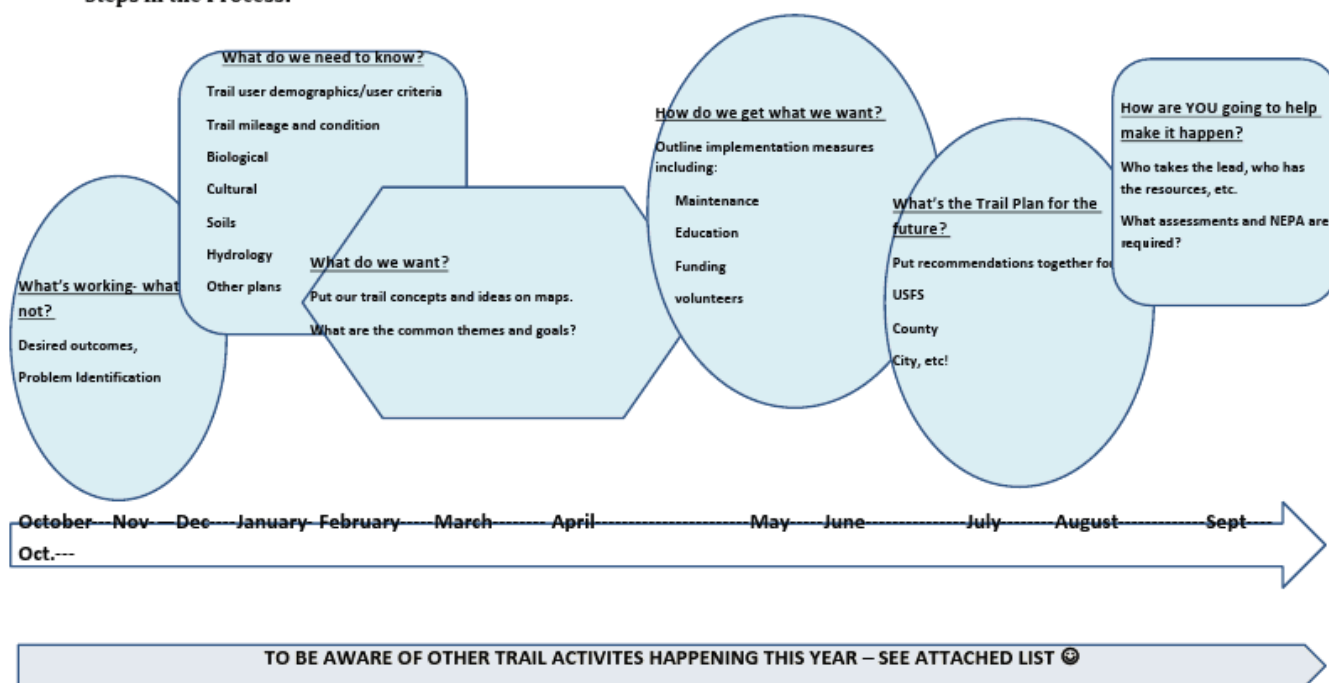
Welcome

Cate welcomed the 68 participants to the monthly trails planning meeting and asked that participants introduce themselves to others sitting at their table. She then

reviewed where we are in the planning process relevant to the initial schedule from the 10/25/12 meeting and Jennifer's presentation of the steps in the process from the 11/29/12 meeting (see the hand out information included here – *formatting is slightly off and not correctable in the file*).

2013 - RED ROCK TRAIL PLANNING PROCESS

Steps in the Process:



Cate said that this planning process seeks to understand the needs of each user group. The goal of the process is to collaborate among all the trail user groups to present those needs, in a unified way, into the comments and recommendations that will be provided to the Forest Service District Ranger at the completion of this process. She said participants of this process have stepped up to a higher level of responsibility to help address trail user concerns and needs, now and into the future. In addition, the FS has provided a broad opportunity for user groups and the public to create trail recommendations that fit within the larger environmental and social context of the area.

Cate asked Lars Romig to explain the website he created where he is posting all the meeting notes and documents from this process. Lars said all the documents are set up on a Google docs page that can be accessed via www.vvcc.us and click on the “RTCA Documents” folder. This web link can also be a hot link on other websites. The purpose of the website is to make the planning process information as accessible as possible within the community. Meeting notes and other Forest Service related documents for this trails planning process are also at www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/coconino/recarea/?recid=54892.

Jennifer described the presentations for the evening, biology and archaeology, as well as search and rescue and said they are critical components in the overall, big picture of important components that affect the outcomes of this trails planning process. She also provided a handout that lists the Districts

2013 trail program of work including information about other trails planning processes and on-going maintenance and trail work (volunteer opportunities) (see handout at end).

Presentation about the Biology on the Red Rock District

Janie Agyagos, Forest Service biologist, presented information on “Trails Effects on Biological Resources”. She said trails don’t affect common species, typically. However, the Red Rock District has sensitive plant and wildlife species and the amount of trail users on the District trails has resulted in patterns of impact and adverse effects.

Janie said her role, for example with a proposed trail, is to conduct analysis of the threatened and endangered species, candidate species and indicator species, such as migratory birds, in consultation with the US Fish & Wildlife Service for biological opinions. If the findings indicate an adverse effect or more, her responsibility is to help mitigate the proposed project to avoid or reduce the impact.

Jamie addressed, by each category, the aquatic, invertebrates, avian, and plants communities on the District. Following are brief highlights of her information.

Aquatics – the riparian habitat on the Red Rock District is less than 10% of the landscape and it supports more than 80% of the species dependent on it. There are native fish in the system and 12 have special status. Fine, loose soils from land disturbance on upland areas (roads, parking, grazing, trails, etc.), gets embedded, as sedimentation, in the critical cobble spaces between the stream gravel that provide aeration, food and other contributors to the stream and increase the incidence of flood events and the concentrations of ecoli. These spaces store nutrients critical to the whole food chain for Oak Creek, which has an Arizona outstanding stream status.

Invertebrates – snakes eat and prey on invertebrates. The Narrow Headed Garter Snake depends on Oak Creek and due to disturbance/loss of habitat is critically endangered.

Avian – there are bald eagle nest sites along the stream bed. A mating pair will abandon their nest (6 month nesting period) if disturbed, thus reducing that population. The FS closes trails that are too close to bald eagle nesting sites during the nesting season. Black hawks also abandon nest sites because of disturbance – that could be too much noise or human presence too close. The Yellow-billed Cuckoo breeds in July in riparian areas and forages in adjacent mesquite bosques.

Peregrine Falcons are upland species that nest high. Some of the Red Rock trails are at elevations that affect the nests, especially when unplanned social trails are cut in those areas. Mexican Spotted Owls are typically in rough canyons and not usually disturbed by trails.

There are 18 bat species on the District, some are declining. Bats are sensitive to noise and other social disturbances. Research from 1972 and repeated in 1997, indicates that one species is gone, and some are missing from local sites.

Plants – as a result of the analysis and the environmental compliance process, any proposed trail through a rare plant population area would be re-routed to avoid the area. And the area will be monitored for

recreation impact over time. Invasive weed areas are also avoided from proposed trails, to reduce the spread of the seeds to other sites.

Question/Answer

There were some questions about the scenic helicopter flights over the district – one regarding the impacts of jet fuel on wildlife. There are no studies regarding jet fuel impacts. However, a Peregrine Falcon pair abandoned their nest due to air traffic activity. Forest Service staff will contact the Sedona Airport and Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to encourage voluntary compliance by pilots to avoid fly overs of sensitive areas. The challenge is to get the information out to pilots.

One question asked about specific studies that have addressed the embeddedness impacts to streams from trails and other developments. The FS conducted riparian research after the Brin's wildfire and found that fish populations moved as sediment built up, then came back after the system was flushed through rains.

Janie said the FS monitors where trail or other construction has happened. And, in the case of a social trail on a hill, there is always a slug of soil at the bottom in the stream. Also, sediments are accumulated from the whole watershed, especially where plant colonies are thin, trampled or strained.

Presentation about the Archaeology on the Red Rock District

Travis Bone, FS archaeologist, presented historic background information and specific facts related to trails and archaeology. The Red Rock District, and much of the Coconino Forest, is rich with artifacts of human presence, some dating back about 12,000 years to the Clovis culture and stone tools era. The Red Rock District especially, is home to cultural sites from the Early Sinagua village pit houses and pottery shards from about 0 - 900 AD, the Late Pueblo rock house period from about 1200 - 1425 AD, and more current Yavapai/Apache period from about 1200 AD to the present.

Travis said there are signs on the surface and just below the surface that archaeologists look for, but can be overlooked and disturbed by casual users. When planning for trails, his job is to review for possible disturbance to a known site, and to consider how a trail drainage, for example, may impact a site downhill from the trail tread or carry away artifacts from the trail site through erosion. Without intending to, trail users can pick up artifacts from a site to bring home, crush artifacts or damage sites by disturbing a rock wall that does not appear to be important, or by gathering rock from around the area to help delineate the trail. On the other hand, intentional looting of sites is damaging and illegal.

Travis talked about the federal laws that govern activity and protocols on federal land related to Native American sites and respect for Native American sovereignty. He said Yavapai and Apache tribal members, still consider many sites and viewsheds on the Red Rock District sacred to their people and ancestors. Partnerships between the FS and Native American tribes have been formed to reach agreements on how the FS can fulfill its mandate of multiple use and Tribal beliefs and customs can be honored and protected. Some of the sacred sites are ceremonial gathering areas that can and have been impacted by trails and other uses.

A series of procedures, protocols and reporting, governed by the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), are required when a proposed trail prompts an archaeological analysis, including consultation with the Tribes involved. The final reports are submitted

to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). If all parties agree to the analysis findings, the proposed trail is submitted to the Forest Supervisor for approval of the archaeological clearance.

The FS has a general map of extremely high to high site density areas that involves much of the greater Sedona area. Some areas are known to be sensitive but have not been surveyed for artifacts yet, other sensitive sites, such as the Schnebly Hill area, are currently being impacted by trails, especially social trails.

Archaeological surveys are expensive and conducted in response to a proposed action. Until a trail, or other disturbance activity, is proposed there is insufficient funding to do exploratory site survey work. Very little excavation is done purely for scientific purpose, it is mostly done for public good reasons such as infrastructure, recreation, etc. Otherwise it would be left alone, which is the preference of the Tribes – to have sacred sites be left to the natural process.

The Wilderness areas on the Red Rock District are very dense artifact sites.

Question and Answer

Are there any trails on the District that have been designed for archaeological education purposes? Palatki Vista (volunteer talks nearly year round) and Honanki (self-guided) trails are educational when they are open. And Tuzigoot National Park has a cultural interpretive exhibit of the area.

How does the FS educate trail users about how to discern cultural remains visible on the ground? As a casual user, it is hard to see and recognize evidence in the field. There are educational materials and volunteer assistance at the Visitor Center, but not everyone uses the Center. On a very limited budget, the FS goal is to increase education and information about the importance of cultural sites, in order to increase support for preservation of sacred/cultural sites.

Jennifer said that 100% of unauthorized user-created routes that have been surveyed show impacts to archaeology sites.

Presentation about the Search and Rescue activities on the Red Rock District

Mike Ward, a search and rescue volunteer from the Yavapai County Search and Rescue, talked about the state of search and rescue on the District.

The Yavapai County Sheriff's office responds to the call for help on 2/3rd of the District, the Coconino County Sheriff's office responds to another 1/3rd of the calls. When there is need for medical assistance, the Sedona Fire Department is called.

Mike was reporting on the Yavapai County numbers, only. He said in 2012 there were 31 people contacted for help and no bodies brought out. In 2011 there were 40 people contacted for help and 2 bodies brought out. In 2010 there were 80 people contacted for help and 6 bodies brought out.

Mike said there is one area of particular problem for calls where there was a junction of trails but no signage. He said, last year there was signage installed at the junction and the number of calls has dropped. Specifically, he mentioned the Doe Mountain, Hiline and Bear Mountain trails as problem areas.

He said there are 300 miles of trails in the system, and about 200 miles of those are not signed and not maintained regularly. He also said “don’t have more trails than can be signed and maintained”. There is a need for more help if there are more trails. In the case of every rescue, those rescued never thought they would ever need that kind of help. He said people over estimate their ability, under-estimate the trail conditions or difficulty and do not keep track of the time of sunset. Most of the rescues are at dusk or dark, most are hikers not mountain bikers.

Lars Romig provided information from the Sedona Fire Department related to emergency rescues. The Fire Department is called in when there is a medical need related to the rescue. He said the Fire Rescue Team responded to 54 calls this year, 38 had injuries (mostly leg injuries and hypothermia). He said the longer someone is lost, the more likely they need medical help.

A typical Team response includes 6 Fire Department staff for anywhere from 20 minutes to 2 hours in duration. One extreme situation required 40 people over a 38 hour period. The cost of a rescue is \$20 per hour times 6 staff. This cost is borne by the community.

Lars said the causes for rescue are that people are getting off the trail and going deeper into the area instead of turning back. He said most are not prepared, not paying attention, are unrealistic about their ability and don’t know when to stop. Most are not from the area. They go from “mild to wild” when they don’t pay attention to where they started and don’t know the area. He said it is easier to find them when they can identify landmarks.

Question and Answer

What can we do better in this trails planning process to address this? Who pays for the rescues? Both Mike and Lars said that signage makes a big difference. They cited the Hot Loop trail sign that reads “don’t go unless you want to get rescued”. They said signs that help trail users get from one trail to another in the system would help. It would also be helpful to have trail rating signs, possibly similar to the ski trail system that identifies elevation and distance.

What is the legal obligation for bad decisions by trail users? The response costs are paid from taxes. A comment was made that Colorado has a \$3 search and rescue card that is required for every trail user. This means that everyone who uses the system helps pay for the search and rescue.

There was a comment that over-signing a trail can lead to over-reliance on signage and under-assessment of skills to deal with situations. Education of trail users is as important as signage. And educating locally is much easier to do than educating all the visitors that come here and use the trails.

Other Comments Left on the Tables

Participants were asked to write their comments and leave them on the tables if they did not have an opportunity to express them during the meeting. Following are the comments:

- Rescue should not be free of charge. If people know that it will cost them, or their insurance, they will be more careful and thoughtful.
- Dilemma: over-signage of trails reduces the “wilderness” experience some of us are looking for.
- What is the data used to base decisions about parking lot size and location?
- I laud the effort to keep people off scenic viewsheds.

- Big problem is that visitors underestimate the trails. They are on vacation in a tourist area and are unprepared.
- At a prior meeting, someone presented statistics showing the dramatic increase in usage of the Sedona trails. It seems we need to make a determined effort to establish what usage level this area can accommodate. We cannot merely let usage increase, lest we overwhelm the area and make the area far less attractive.
- Ask Janie about panthers.
- How can the helicopter disturbances be limited?
- What about the endangered cliff rose?
- Cate's 25 minute introduction was too long.
- What to hurry to/from:
 - o Get away from generalities
 - o Discuss trails by area
 - o Discuss individual trails where necessary
 - o Get someone intimately familiar with Sedona area trails involved in meeting leadership
 - o Cut the bureaucracy
- What is the official FS trail network?

What Worked

The education sessions were informative

Mingling at the tables with new people

Venue

Learning how trail use impacts trails and this process

Lars' posting the meeting documents on the www.vvcc.us website

Jennifer and Heather for this open process

Emails prior to the meeting to review and prepare

Stretch mid-way through the meeting

Learning about the issues, rules and laws the FS faces that effect this planning process

What Needs Improvement

More interactions at tables to discuss information and presentations as they happen

Need facilitators at each table for discussions

Need more Q & A time with experts after presentations, have them come back to other meetings

Want to hear from other experts about trail building

Use the expertise about trail planning that is here and local

Deal with the key issues people have sooner

The City of Sedona can provide venues for more education sessions at times outside of these planning meetings, if that is a desire

Next Meeting Date, Topics

Next meeting is Thursday February 21, 2013 from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Hilton Sedona.

Next Meeting Agenda

- Presentation about the Soils and Hydrology on the Red Rock District
- Presentation "Better Living Through Trails" by IMBA Southwest Regional Director
- What does the Forest Plan say about Red Rock Trails?

- Discussion